



May 22, 2013

The Honorable Dean Oliver Barrow  
Prime Minister of Belize  
National Assembly Building  
Belmopan, Belize

Dear Prime Minister Barrow,

I write as president of the Society for American Archaeology (SAA) to convey our organization's great distress at the recent destruction of the Mayan pyramid at Nohmul, which was more than 2000 years old, for road construction material. This action has drawn worldwide attention and protest.

SAA is an international organization that, since its founding in 1934, has been dedicated to research about and interpretation and protection of the archaeological heritage of the Americas. With more than 7,000 members, SAA represents professional archaeologists in colleges and universities, museums, government agencies, and the private sector. SAA has members in most Latin American countries, including many archaeologists from Belize or who work in Belize.

We know that you and your government are aware of the incident, and are encouraged by the statements of Belizean officials promising to take strong action to punish the firm in question and to rectify any deficiencies in the law. While we also understand the financial and infrastructure limitations faced by your nation in protecting its irreplaceable cultural resources, it is incomprehensible that the construction company could even conceive of demolishing, for the use of its raw materials, one of the area's most important and well-known Mayan sites. This was a willful and intentional act, and one that serves only to deprive the world of precious knowledge of the past. Given the progress made in recent years on Central American heritage preservation, including Belize's Memorandum of Understanding with the United States for the protection of threatened archaeological resources, this wanton vandalism is a huge setback, and must not be allowed to take place again.

The SAA has long supported Belize's Institute of Archaeology. We recognize that the existing national antiquities legislation is strong and comprehensive. The incident at Nohmul reminds us that both national and international laws and treaties must be vigilantly enforced and modified as needed to make them applicable to the 21st century. SAA stands with the Institute of Archaeology to pursue all these avenues and to continue to seek ways to strengthen protections of Belize's cultural heritage. We know that you will pursue this case as vigorously as

possible to send the appropriate signal that Belize's past is not to be sacrificed in the name of progress. Count on our support in this effort.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jeffrey A. Altschul". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping flourish at the end.

Jeffrey Altschul, Ph.D., RPA  
President

CC: Hon. José Manuel Heredia Jr., Minister of Tourism and Culture  
Ms. Tracey Taeger Panton, Ministry of Tourism and Culture  
Mrs. Diane Haylock, President, National Institute of Culture and History  
Dr. Jaime Awe, Institute of Archaeology  
Dr. Gregory Borgstede, Cultural Analyst, U.S. Department of State